

Tim and the Hidden People

# News from the North

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Ray Mutimer



E-G

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ARNOLD-WHEATON





“Well, Tim, that’s it,” said Mr. Penny, shutting the door of his shop, and dropping the bolt into place. He went over to the till, and took out five pound notes. “Here you are. That’s what you’ve earned today.”

He handed Tim the money.

Tim was sweeping the floor of the shop. He stopped for a moment, took the five pounds, and pushed them into his pocket. “Thanks, Mr. Penny,” he said.

“You’ve earned it,” said Mr. Penny. “You’re a hard worker, Tim. I’ll say that for you. There aren’t many boys I’d want in here on a Saturday, when I’m busy. Most of ’em are more trouble than they’re worth. But you’re all right. You’re a worker.”

Tim grinned. He remembered what a hard time he had had, getting Mr. Penny to give him a job on Saturdays. Mr. Penny had been sure that he wouldn’t stick at the work for more than an hour. He swept the dust, the bits of cabbage and the scraps of paper from the floor of the shop into a dustpan, and emptied the pan into a bin at the back.

Tim had been working for Mr. Penny every Saturday for months now. He had been saving up to get a bicycle. He had found a good second-hand one in a shop down the road. It was a bit heavy, but it was very strong, and it had a three-speed and a carrier. Arun was going camping, and if Tim was going to go with him, he had to get that bicycle. He had paid for it last week.

“Did you come on your new bike?” asked Mr. Penny, putting on his coat.





Tim shook his head. “No,” he said. “I didn’t want to leave it in the street.”

“Quite right,” said Mr. Penny. “You can’t trust people, these days. I remember a time when a chap sold newspapers on the corner. He used to go off for his dinner and leave the papers there for people to help themselves. He never lost more than a penny or two. But not now. You couldn’t do that these days. Ready?”

Mr. Penny opened the back door, in the room behind the shop.

“Coming,” said Tim. He put the broom away, and went out into the street.

Mr. Penny locked the door behind them.

“Well,” said Mr. Penny. “I shan’t be seeing you for a bit now, shall I? When are you off?”

“Wednesday morning,” said Tim. “School ends on Tuesday.”

“It’ll be a bit cold up north, won’t it?” asked Mr. Penny. “It’s only April.”

“We’ve got sleeping bags,” said Tim.

“Not my idea of a holiday,” said Mr. Penny. “Well, have a good time.”

He climbed into his lorry, which was standing in the street, and drove off down the road.

Tim ran off towards The Yard.

When Tim had first asked Aunt May if he could go off camping with Arun, she hadn’t liked the idea at all. It was Mr. Berryman who had talked her into letting him go. “Tim needs a holiday,” Mr. Berryman had said. “It would do him a lot of good. You can’t take him yourself. Arun’s a good lad. Let them go off for a week or two. It will do them both the world of good.”

“But what if Tim’s ill?” Aunt May said.

“He won’t be,” said Mr. Berryman.

“But we can’t afford it,” said Aunt May. “I want Tim to get some new clothes with that money he’s earned.”

“A bike will do him more good than new clothes,” said Mr. Berryman. “That boy needs fresh air, and a bit of fun. Let him have a holiday. He’s earned it.”

So Aunt May had said that he could go, and Tim had been looking forward to it ever since Christmas.



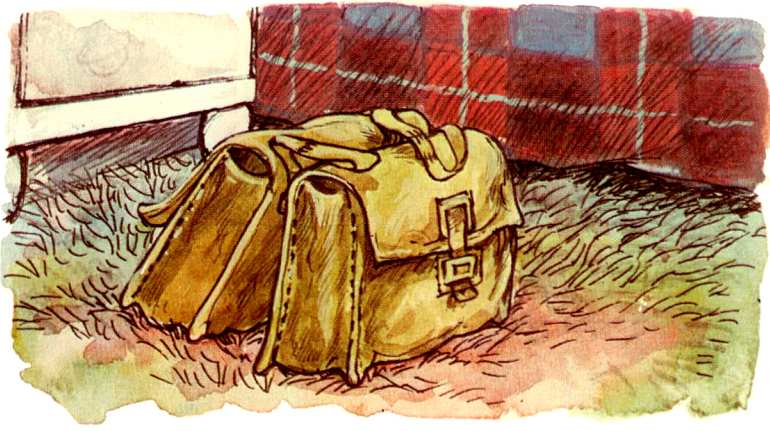


The sky was beginning to cloud over as Tim turned into The Yard, and the wind was cold.

He was just turning in at the gate of his house, when he heard a sound behind him. Tim looked back. For a moment, he thought he saw someone standing by the old tree in the middle of The Yard. But when he looked again, there was no one there.

Tim shivered. He ran up the steps and tried the front door, but it was locked. Aunt May wasn't back yet. She was often late on a Saturday, when she worked in a shop in the town. Tim went back down the steps, took the key from under a stone, and let himself in.

Again, as he shut the door, he thought someone was under the tree, watching him. He opened the door again quickly. But there was no one there, so he shut the door firmly, and went downstairs to the kitchen, to put the kettle on. Then he went upstairs to his room.



Two old haversacks stood on the floor by the chest of drawers. Tim had cut the long straps on the haversacks, and sewn the short ends together, so that the haversacks would fit on his bicycle. The shortened straps went across the carrier, and one haversack hung down on each side of the back wheel.

Tim opened a drawer, and began to take out some clothes. He wanted to see if he could fit them all into one of the haversacks. That would leave the other haversack for food.

As he pulled out a sweater, his hand touched something hard. He picked it up. It was the coin with the hole in the middle, which Melinda, the witch, had given him. The coin still hung on the thin silver chain, given to him by Grandmother Roon.





Tim looked at the coin for a minute or two, and then hung it round his neck. He pushed it down under his clothes.

“I may as well know if there *is* anyone about,” he muttered to himself. “At least I’ll be able to see the Hidden People, if I wear Melinda’s coin. I’d rather see them, if they’re about.”

He suddenly remembered the kettle, and ran off downstairs, two steps at a time. The kitchen was full of steam, but the kettle hadn’t boiled dry. He’d put a lot of water in it. Tim made himself a mug of tea, cut a slice of bread and jam, and took it all upstairs.



He pushed open the door of his room, and stopped dead. The window was open, and Tobias, the cat, was standing on his bed, looking at him. Tobias's eyes were a very bright green, and his long black tail was waving slowly to and fro over his head.



“Tobias!” cried Tim. “I haven’t seen you for months!”

“Whose fault is that?” asked Tobias, a little coldly. “You haven’t been wearing Melinda’s coin. *You* haven’t seen *me*, but *I’ve* seen *you*.”

“I’m sorry, Tobias,” said Tim. He came into the room and set his mug down on the table. “I can’t wear it at school. Someone saw it, and started asking questions.”

Tobias’s tail stopped waving, but he said nothing. He just stood there, looking at Tim.

“Have some bread and jam,” said Tim, sitting down on the chair. He broke off a piece of bread, and held it out to Tobias.

Tobias took no notice of the bread and jam, but he looked a little more friendly.

“Melinda sent you a message, Tim,” he said. “She wants to see you. You’re to go to her cottage tomorrow.”

“What does she want to see me for?” asked Tim. “I’m going camping with Arun on Wednesday. I can’t do anything for Melinda till I get back. What does she want me to do?”

“I don’t know,” said Tobias. “Melinda didn’t tell me. But you’d better go, Tim. Melinda may be a safe witch, but she’s a witch, and witches don’t like it, if you don’t come when they ask you to. You go tomorrow, Tim. The road’s quite safe. There aren’t any dangerous people about just now.”

Tobias jumped down off the bed, and walked over to the window. He jumped up on to the sill.



“You be sure to go, Tim,” he said, looking back. “That’s my advice. You be sure to go.”

He twitched his long black tail, and, before Tim could say anything else, he jumped out of the window.

Tim ran over to it, and looked out. He was just in time to see a broomstick disappearing over the roof of Mr. Berryman’s house, with Tobias standing on one end of it, twitching his long tail. Then Tobias was gone.

Tim went slowly across to the bed and sat down, munching his bread and jam. He didn't know what to do. He *must* go off camping with Arun. He couldn't give that up. But Melinda had always been kind to him, in her own way, and he could easily ride over to see her on Sunday. He sat in his room, thinking, until Aunt May came home, and it was time for supper. When Tim went up to bed, he still wasn't sure what he was going to do in the morning.

"But I think I'd better go," he said to himself, as he slipped into bed and pulled up the bedclothes. "After all, I don't know what Melinda wants me for. It might be something that really mattered – something I'll have to do. And Tobias is right: Melinda *is* a witch. If I don't go on my own, I might find myself there anyway."

\* \* \* \* \*

Sunday morning was fine, but Tim couldn't get away until after dinner. Aunt May always cooked something he liked on Sundays, and she felt hurt if he wasn't there to eat it.

Arun had gone to see his grandmother for the day, so Tim spent the morning cleaning and oiling his bicycle, and making sure that he had everything ready.

It was nearly two o'clock when at last he pedalled off down the road along the canal.

There wasn't much traffic, and before long he left the streets of the town behind him. The wind was cold, but the fields looked bright and green in the sunshine.



Tim pedalled on. At first, he kept a sharp look-out for Hidden People, but he saw very few people about at all, and no one who looked strange.

The road ran past the house where Mr. Penny's son lived. Mr. Penny was working in his son's garden, and he looked up as Tim went by.

"Tim!" he called. "Tim! Wait a moment!"

Tim swung his bicycle across the road and stopped, with one foot on the ground.

"Hallo, Mr. Penny," he said.

"I was going to look in and see you, Tim," said Mr. Penny. "I saw Jim Black last night. He drives one of those big lorries, and he's going up to the north on Wednesday. He said he'd give you a lift, if you'd like one. He can pack all your things on the lorry. Would you?"

"Oh yes," said Tim. "That'd be fine."

"Well, he's starting early," said Mr. Penny. "But if you can be outside my shop at six o'clock sharp, Wednesday morning, he'll take you both, and your bikes too."

"Thanks, Mr. Penny," said Tim. "Thanks very much. We'll be there."

Mr. Penny nodded. "Have a good holiday," he said. "That bike looks a good one."

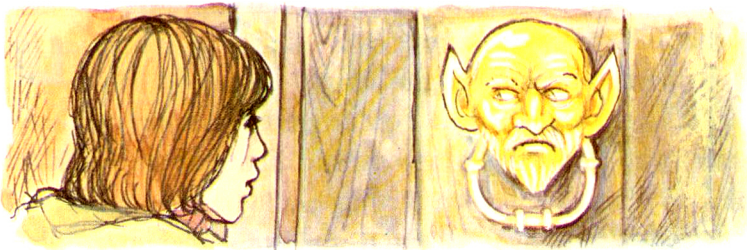
He turned back to his gardening.

Tim was very pleased. For a moment, he almost turned back to go and tell Arun about it. But Arun might not be back in The Yard before evening.

Tim decided that he had better go and see what Melinda wanted, before he did anything else. He pushed off, and cycled along happily.

But as he got nearer to Melinda's cottage, he began to worry. What did Melinda want to see him about? After all, she was a witch.

He came to the turn to the left, and looked down the path. There was Melinda's cottage, and the bridge over the canal, where he had seen the wild witches. The cottage itself looked bright and cheerful in the spring sunshine, but clouds were blowing up, and the hill and the wood were in shadow. Tim turned down the path. He jumped off at Melinda's gate, and leant his bicycle up against the wall. He pushed the gate open. There were primroses and violets out in Melinda's garden. For some reason, this made Tim feel safer, but when he got to the door, the face on the brass knocker looked at him as sourly as it always had. Tim picked up a stone and knocked three times on the door. He could never bring himself to use that knocker.





The door opened at once, and there was Melinda. She looked at him in a kindly way, and nodded her head. But her eyes looked very dark and bright, and Tim felt a little shiver go down his back.



“Come in, Tim,” said Melinda.

Tim stepped inside.

“Tobias!” he cried.

A fire was burning brightly in the grate, and Tobias was sitting beside it, with his tail curled around him, looking at Tim. A big black kettle stood steaming on the hob.

“Hallo, Tim,” said Tobias.

“Sit down, Tim,” said Melinda, shutting the door behind him.

Tim went across to the fire, and sat down.

“Well, Tim, how are you?” asked Melinda. She sat down on the other side of the fire.

“I’m all right,” said Tim.

Melinda looked at him and smiled.

Tim felt happier. Melinda looked so much kinder when she smiled.

“You’re wondering what I’m going to ask you to do, Tim,” she said. “You’re right. There is something I want you to do, but you’re free to say no, if you don’t want to do it. I’m not like the wind witches. The people who help me, help me of their own free will.”

She paused. Tim gulped. “I – I’m going away,” he said. “I’m going camping, with Arun. We’re starting on Wednesday morning.”

“I know that,” said Melinda, “and I shan’t stop you. But I have had a message, Tim – a message from Alan Tremaine.”

Tim's thoughts went back to the last time he had seen Alan Tremaine. It was when he had been with Jeremy and Nicola, and they had escaped from the wind witches by riding the night-mares. Alan Tremaine had been a good friend then.

"Tim," said Melinda, looking across at him with eyes that seemed to see right inside him. "Tim, do you remember Nicola and Jeremy?"

"Of course," said Tim. He would never forget the two Hidden children. He had escaped with them to the north, when the wind witches were after them.

"Do you remember that I told you their father and mother had disappeared?"

Tim nodded.

"Their father is called Gareth, and their mother's name is Fiona," said Melinda. "Alan had a message from the people of the moor. The wind witches sent Gareth and Fiona north, to the stone men. The stone men have put them in a prison. They have put them inside two great stones."

Melinda paused, as if she were waiting for him to speak. But Tim could think of nothing to say. He was beginning to guess what Melinda wanted him to do, and he didn't feel very happy about it.

"Alan Tremaine has sent you a message, Tim," said Melinda. "He wants you to go north. Alan is trying to rescue Gareth and Fiona, and he needs your help. He cannot rescue them, unless you help him."



In spite of the fire, Tim felt cold. The room seemed to grow darker. He stared at Melinda, and he shivered.

“If Alan can’t save them from the stone men, what can I do?” said Tim. “*I shan’t be able to do anything.*”



“There is only one way to open the stones and set Gareth and Fiona free from their enchantment,” said Melinda quietly. “Someone must take silver water and pour it over the stone prisons. Then the stones will break open, and the prisoners can escape. Alan knows of a spring of silver water, but he cannot get it himself.

“The spring rises in Diaman’s Cave on an island. The cave is guarded by a silver web. The Hidden People cannot break that web and remain alive. Only one of the Ordinary Folk can do that. And it must be one of the Ordinary Folk who can see and talk to the Hidden People. That is why Alan Tremaine has sent a message asking for your help.”

“But Alan isn’t one of the Hidden People,” said Tim.

“He is one of the Strange Ones,” said Melinda. “His mother was one of the Ordinary Folk, but his father was one of the Hidden People. Alan Tremaine will die, if he tries to break the silver web.”

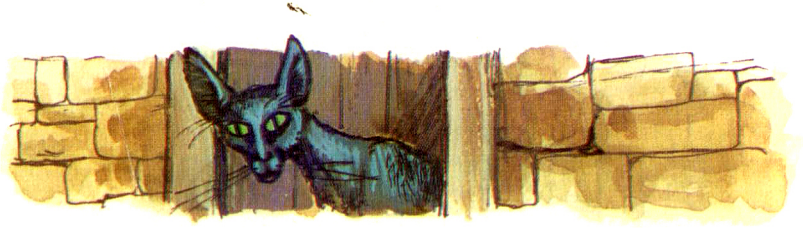
“But I’m going off with Arun,” said Tim. “We’re going camping. We planned it months ago.” But as he spoke, Tim knew that he would have to help Alan Tremaine. Alan had saved them from Mandrake and the wind witches. If Alan needed his help, he would have to go.

Tim looked quickly across at Melinda. She was watching him, with her dark eyes fixed on his face. As he looked, she suddenly smiled at him, and her whole face changed. Tim wondered if she knew what he was thinking.

Melinda got up and went to the door.

“Tobias,” she said quietly.

Tobias leapt across the room after her. Melinda gave him a quick nod and opened the door. Tobias slipped through it without a word.



Melinda came back to the fire.

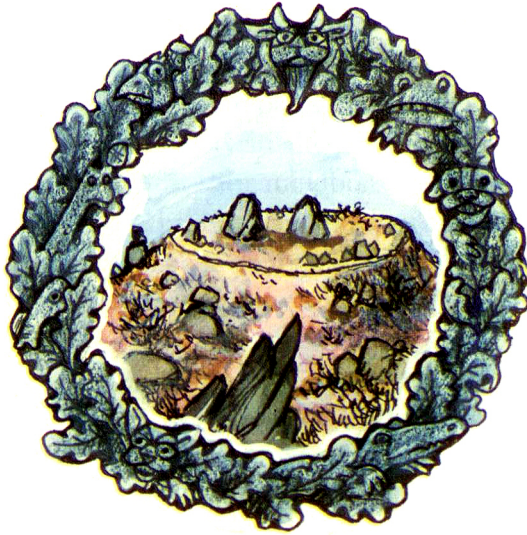
“I have something to show you, Tim,” she said. “Do you see that mirror hanging on the wall?”

Tim looked up, and saw a beautiful round mirror, set in an old, black, wooden frame. The frame was carved, so that it looked like a ring of leaves, with strange creatures looking out of it. Tim was sure that he hadn’t seen the mirror before.

“Look in the mirror, Tim,” said Melinda softly. She got up, came over to his chair and laid one of her hands on the back of his neck.

Tim felt his hair lift, and shiver after shiver ran down his spine. The room seemed very dark. The sunlight had gone. The fire burnt low. The mirror on the wall shone brightly.

Tim stared into the mirror. At first, he saw nothing but a silver mist, which drifted across the glass. Then the mist cleared.



Tim saw a hill, with great stones sticking up through heather and gorse. There were no trees there. It was a bare countryside and the wind was blowing.

There was an old ditch running round the top of the hill, and here and there great stones stood out, as if there had once been a wall. The top of the hill, inside the ditch, was flat, and in the centre there were two great grey stones, bigger than the rest.

“Can you see them, Tim? The stone prisons?”

Melinda’s voice seemed to come from a long way away.

Tim gasped and shook himself free from Melinda’s hand. The mirror misted over and the room grew bright again.



“Did you see the stone prisons, Tim?” asked Melinda.  
Tim swallowed hard. “Yes,” he said.

“Remember the hillside, so that you will know it again,”  
said Melinda.

“I’ll remember,” said Tim.

“You must go now,” said Melinda, getting up. “Your  
friend Arun will be waiting for you.”

Tim got up slowly. “But where is the silver water?” he  
asked. “And where shall I meet Alan Tremaine?”

Tim hadn’t said that he would help Alan, but he knew  
that he was going to. Melinda seemed to know it, too.

“Go north with Arun, just as you planned,” she said.  
“Alan will send you a message, and tell you where to meet  
him.”

She went across to the cottage door, and opened it. Tim  
walked slowly out, as if he were in a dream.

“Don’t be afraid, Tim,” said Melinda. “May good luck  
go with you!” She looked down at him in a kindly way for a  
moment, and then shut the door.

Tim stood staring at the door for a minute or two. There  
were so many questions he wanted to ask. But the brass  
knocker stared back at him angrily, as if daring him to  
knock, and Tim didn’t like the look of it at all. Melinda had  
said that Alan would send him a message. He’d better leave  
it at that.

He turned slowly back down the path to the gate, picked  
up his bicycle, and set off for home.

\* \* \* \* \*

By the time he got home, Tim had decided that there was only one thing for him to do. He must tell Arun exactly what had happened.

He put his bicycle away in the shed at the back of the house. He had only just shut the door of the shed, and was turning to go into the house, when the back gate was pushed open, and Arun came into the back yard.

"Tim," said Arun. "I saw you come back. I've something to show you."

"What is it?" asked Tim.

"Not here," said Arun. "I'm not sure who's about."

"Come up to my room," said Tim.

They went inside and up the stairs. They said nothing more until they were in Tim's room. Then Tim shut the door and turned to Arun. "Well?" he said. "What is it?"

"Look," said Arun, holding out his hand.



Tim stared. Arun was holding a silver key. The top of the key was shaped rather like a cat's face, with two holes for eyes and pointed ears.

"Where did you find it?" Tim cried. "It's *the* key – the key to the Hidden People. You'll be able to see them now, just as I do. But I gave it to Captain Jory."

"I found it lying on the pavement, outside the house, when I came home," said Arun. "And the first thing I saw was a black cat, with a long tail and bright green eyes, in the old tree."

"That must have been Tobias," said Tim. "So that's why he left!"

"What do you mean?" asked Arun.

"Sit down," said Tim. "I've a lot to tell you. I've been to see Melinda."

Arun sat down in the chair and Tim sat on the bed. There was so much to tell, that Tim found it hard to begin, but once he had started, the story poured out of him.

"So you see, Arun," he ended at last, "it's not going to be anything like we had planned. I have to help Alan Tremaine."

Arun looked at Tim, and his eyes were very bright. "It's *much* better than anything we'd planned, Tim," he said. "It's going to be the most exciting holiday we've ever had. And I'm glad I'm going to be able to help you this time. At least I'll be able to see the Hidden People now."



“It may be a bit *too* exciting,” said Tim, remembering Mandrake and the wind witches. “Some of the Hidden People are dangerous. But you can always throw the key away. I think you’d be all right, if you did that.”

“I won’t do that,” said Arun. “We’ll have to try and help. Of course we will.”

“Tim!” That was Aunt May, calling up the stairs. “Tim! Come down now. Supper’s ready.”

“I’ll have to go,” said Arun. “They’ll be waiting for me, too.”

“Keep a good look-out, in case anyone’s about,” said Tim. “Don’t forget that you’ll be able to see the Hidden People, now you have the key.”

Arun laughed. “I won’t forget,” he said. “There’s not much chance of that! See you tomorrow, Tim.” They ran downstairs.

Tim half expected to find Tobias in his room, when he went back there after supper, but there was no sign of him. Sebastian, who usually slept on Tim’s feet, was missing too. Tim wondered where he was, as he climbed into bed. He was so used to having Sebastian there, that he missed him.

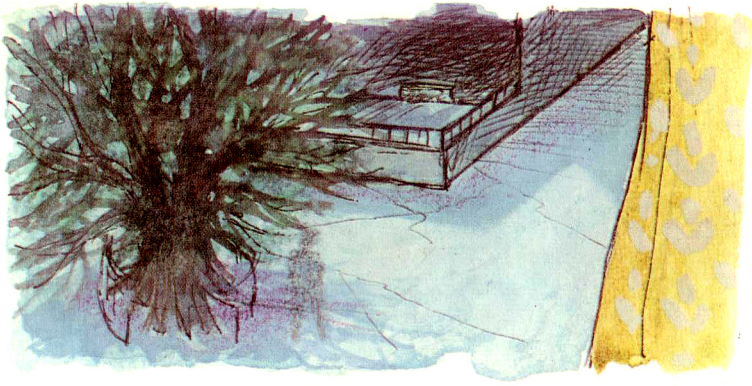
He was still excited by his afternoon with Melinda, and it took him a long time to go to sleep.

It was hours later, when Tim suddenly woke up. He sat up in bed. There was a loud purr from the foot of the bed, and Sebastian walked up his legs, and rubbed himself against Tim’s arm.



“Sebastian!” cried Tim. “Where have you been, and how did you get here?”

The moon was shining in through the window, and Tim saw something long and dark lying on the floor. He scrambled out of bed to look at it. It was a broomstick. There wasn’t much doubt about how Sebastian had arrived.



Tim went over to the window, and stared out into the night. The stars were shining, and the sky was clear. Everything looked silvery under the moon.

He looked down into The Yard, and gave a quick gasp. Someone was standing there under the tree! Tim stared down, but he couldn't see who it was. It was just a dark shadow.

Tim shivered. The Hidden People might be exciting by day, but he didn't like meeting them by night, and it was almost always night when he saw them.

Sebastian gave a little purr, jumped off the bed, and rubbed himself against Tim's legs. Tim bent down to stroke him. When he looked down into The Yard again, the shadow had gone.

Tim tossed the broomstick out of the window into The Yard. He picked up Sebastian, and climbed back into bed.



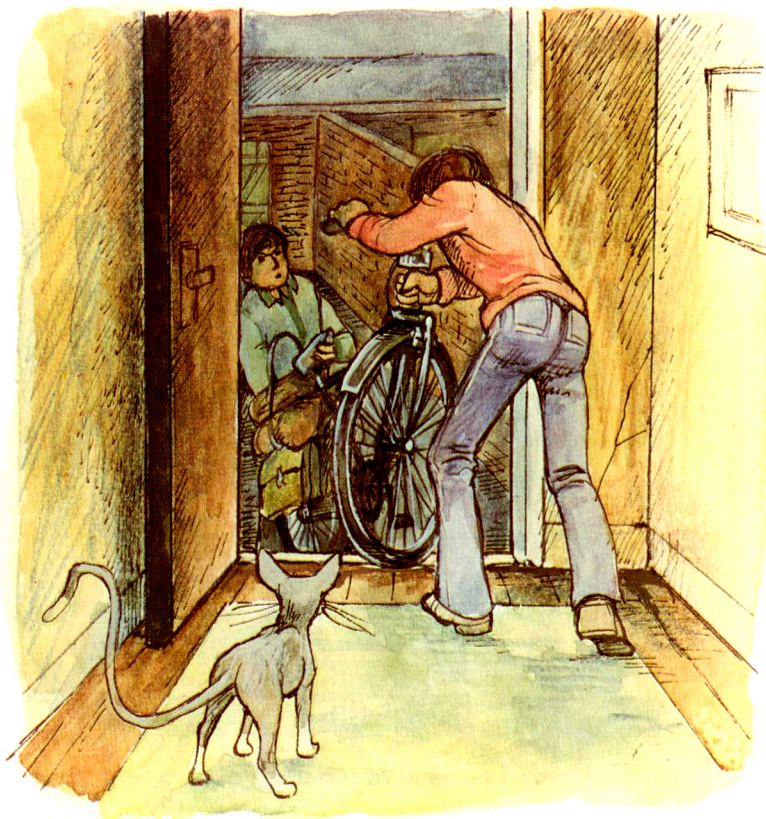


Tim thought that the last two days of school were the longest he had ever known. But they were over at last. He spent Tuesday evening with Arun, packing their bicycles, to be all ready to start very early. They mustn't be late, or they would miss Jim Black's lorry. Jim had said that they must be there by six o'clock if they wanted a ride, and he wouldn't wait.

Tim had meant to leave Sebastian behind. He couldn't imagine how he could take him, unless Sebastian flew along beside them on a broomstick, and Tim could guess what would happen to the rest of the traffic if he did that! Aunt May had said that she would give Sebastian all the food he could eat while Tim was away, and Mr. Berryman had promised to look after him. But it was soon clear that Sebastian had other ideas. He kept jumping on to the carrier of Tim's bike, and when Tim lifted him down, he made a flying leap on to Tim's shoulder.



In the end, Tim borrowed a basket from Aunt May, and tied it on the carrier, on top of his camping things, so that Sebastian could ride in it. Arun was carrying the ground sheet, and Tim was taking the tent. The tent folded flat, and was tied on, across the top of the carrier. The basket went on top of the tent. Sebastian seemed very pleased with the arrangement, and rubbed himself against Tim's legs and purred.



It was almost dark on the Tuesday evening, when Tim and Arun lifted Tim's loaded bicycle up the back steps, and set it against the wall in the back hall for safety. Arun's things were already packed on his own bicycle, and were safely inside his house.





“See you in the morning, Tim,” said Arun.

“You come here at five o’clock,” said Aunt May, coming up the steps from the kitchen. “Tim’s having a good breakfast before he sets off for I don’t know where, and you’ll need one, too. There’s no need to get your mother up. You come and have it with us.”

“Thank you,” said Arun. “I’d like to.”

“Come and have your supper, Tim,” said Aunt May, disappearing again down the steps to the kitchen.

Tim let Arun out of the front door.

“See you in the morning,” he said.

“I’ll be here,” said Arun. He ran off across The Yard.



There was a purr at Tim's feet, and Sebastian rubbed himself hard against Tim's legs.

"You must be sure to wake me up in time, Sebastian," said Tim. "But just now, we both need some supper."

They ran down the steps together into the kitchen, where Aunt May was just dishing up.

## **FLIGHTPATH TO READING**

### **A Series**

1. Tim and Tobias
2. All the Fun of the Fair
3. Tim Meets Captain Jory
4. Tim and the Smugglers
5. Tim and the Witches
6. The Highwayman
7. Magic in The Yard
8. The Key

### **B Series**

1. The Return of The Key
2. Captain Jory Lends a Hand
3. The Stump People
4. Watchers in The Yard
5. Red for Danger
6. At the House of the Safe Witch
7. Tim in Hiding
8. On the Night of the Full Moon

### **C Series**

1. The Pool by the Whispering Trees
2. Tim in Trouble
3. On the Road to the North
4. Riding into Danger
5. Mandrake's Castle
6. Escape by Night
7. Three Fires on the Dark Tower
8. Tim Rides on the Ghost Bus

### **D Series**

1. News from the North
2. The Cry in the Dark
3. The Shield Stone
4. The Storm over the Sea
5. The Cave of the Wind Witches
6. In Diaman's Cave
7. Danger on the Moor
8. At the Hill of the Stone Prisons



# Flightpath to Reading **D1**



E-G